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Murder Is A Private Affair

The room was blanketed with roaches. They scampered over the worn linoleum, maneuvering around butted cigarettes, crumbled candy wrappers, and gutted canned goods. Scores of them crawled around the sardine cans, hesitating, antennae twitching, measuring the availability of food. But most of the brown horde scurried toward the overflowing garbage bag in the corner under the sink. It was a scavenger's delight. They crept through drained soup cans, scrapped bread bags; their bronze appendages sensing the moldy decay of crumbs. Some even wandered down the necks of empty wine bottles, captured in the sludge of remnant alcohol, never to emerge again.

The bed I slept in had been rendered a pathetic sagging thing from the weight of a thousand hooker couplings. As I rose from the bed I frowned at the roaches escaping under the pitted baseboards, disgusting little bastards, and lumbered over to the sink. I stared into the mirror and frowned again.

It had come to this. Looking past my haggard reflection, I stared at the room's reflection. It was a cubbyhole of peeling paint, leaky faucets, and cracked, tissue-thin walls. The furniture was a joke; the slats on the bed frame routinely slipped off its foundation, unceremoniously dumping the lumpy, piss stained mattress and me onto the warped floor. The chest of drawers had more scars than a punch-drunk fighter and the lock on the door could be opened with a toothpick. The closet was a makeshift assemblage of splintered wood nailed together and propped up in a corner. My new home. A fleabag hotel.

I stared into the mirror and not for the first time cringed at the gaunt image in the glass. I was a bit thin. My strutting around weight had dropped from a healthy 195 pounds down to a skinny 176. I never wore belts when I bopped around in my wool slacks, but now I tightened the buckle on my Goodwill specials to keep my threadbare pants from falling down to my knees. I rinsed out a peanut butter jar and filled it with water. I drank. It's amazing how a bellyfull of water holds off hunger pains. I looked into the mirror again. I grimaced. The lines on my brow were deep enough to plant seeds in. The bags under my eyes were swollen pockets of anguish. And if I looked hard enough, if I concentrated, I could trace the tracks of my tears. A red pimple had formed on my lower eye lid, a lament of ceaseless crying. For thirty days and nights I had cried, snot running out my nose, forming twin rivers of puke-green mucus on my upper lip. My eyes were road maps of red veins.

Without warning the tears would come. I could be skulking

through the neighborhood grocery store trying to pocket canned goods and stuff packets of cold cuts down my shorts, or I could be sitting on the toilet hoping like hell that I wouldn't catch something from the hotel's urine stained crapper, and I would think of her and the tears would come. I would think of what I did and the floodgates would open up.

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Everything was so clear. So real. I remember the nights we snapped our fingers, moved our hips, our dry-cleaned clothes now wrinkled and wet as we danced to driving disco sounds. I remember decorating the Christmas tree, hanging candy canes and popcorn on a string. I remember the sparkle in her eyes when she unwrapped an unexpected gift. I remember the snowball fights.

I remember the cute little things we did that all lovers do, sleeping butt naked in the spoon position; kissing the inside of her thighs while she talked on the phone, holding hands, feeling her up. The embraces. The screwing. I remember all that and I start to cry. Again.

How could I have done such a thing? How could I have done that to her? I look at that weary face in the mirror and see no resemblance to the kind, easygoing, gregarious man that she grew to love. How could I have messed up my life like that? Her life? I should be completing work on my degree, preparing for a career, planning our marriage. But, now, I drift into shadows, using the cloak of darkness to hide from the police. Frightened of strangers. Scanning their faces, hoping not to see one who would recognize me. Jumping at the sound of every siren. Wait-

ing for that knock on the door.

How can I explain it? If it hadn't been for that accident I probably would've never known. A funky-ass pickup game at the gym. We cut class, smoked a few joints, drank wine and stumbled to the court. I injured my ankle enough while playing to require a doctor's attention. After my ankle was wrapped, I was sedated with Demerol, put on crutches and sent home in a cab. It would be nice to go home early for a change. I could broil some steaks, toss a salad and have her bathwater ready by the time she left work. It would be a nice surprise.

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It was a surprise all right. She lay there writhing, panting, legs kicked straight up in the air, meeting his pelvic thrusts with a fury. He ground down on her, the sticky, wet sound of their bellies slapping was sickening to me. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head as a gut-wrenching orgasm curled her toes.

That bastard. A young, unemployed, loudmouthed, muscular, long dick neighbor was pumping my woman. Slut! A red-hot tide of anger rose in me like a cyclone. My body went from Demerol-cool to white-hot rage. My eyes squinted to sunburnt slits, my nose flared, the hairs on my arms stood straight out. Without thought, without reflection, I raced to the hall closet and grabbed my 9mm automatic, my mind a jumble of spitting lunacy, and charged into the bedroom. The youngster saw me first. But his youthful speed and quick reflexes were no match for my unbridled rage. The slugs exploded into his sculptured chest,

ripping out chunks of flesh. He flopped to the side of the bed, his manhood leaking out in a flood of avenged blood.

A scream caught in her throat. Her eyes wide as silver dollars. I stitched her up from bellybutton to neckline, the bullets splattering the walls with her blood-red tissues. I stared at the blood spreading on the cum stained sheets. She twitched once, then released a final gasp.

I remember the acrid smell of cordite, the grayish-white vapors of gunpowder drifting. I trembled. My body shook as if I had emerged from an ice plunge. Sweat oozed from my every pore. My heart thundered. I stood stock still, the gun hanging limp in my hand. My God. What had I done?

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The Greyhound carried me clear across country. I had emptied our meager savings account, locked up the house and sailed into oblivion. But I had not run far enough. With every breath I took, I saw her eyes. I saw their coupling, I saw the blood. Even the numbing respite of Thunderbird wine couldn't erase the memory of her. In my dreams I still held her, wanted her, loved her. I ground my teeth, pressed my fist to my head, and clamped my eyes shut against the tears. My chest heaved, wracked with the endless assault of my misery. Remorse rips through me. My God, my God. What had I done?

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